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## THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

18 JULY, 1980

### contents

JULIAN SYMONS	Joyce Killick Wexler: Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth	794
TIM DISEH	Hounds and Mouth (poem)	
COLIN MACFARLANE	W. B. Stanford: Enemies of Poetry	795
HUGH LLOYD-JONES	Charles Kingsley: The Heroes	
MATT SIMPSON	Roger Lancelyn Green: Heroes of Greece and Troy	
PAUL BAILEY	Who's Who in Bontic (poem)	
PETER LEWIS	Fiction	
PETER OLANO	Hugh Fleetwood: Fleetwood Lives	796
	Knot Hamsun: Wayfarers	
	Embarkations (poem)	
A. N. WILSON	Fiction	
ANNE DUCHENE	Barbara Fym: A Few Green Leaves	797
ANDREW HUSLOP	Lillian Hellman: Maybe	
	Jahn Hayloch: One Hot Summer in Kyoto	
PAUL BINDING	Christopher Isherwood: My Gurn and His Disciple	798
A. D. IVYSON	Ursula King: Towards a New Mysticism	
KENNETH BINGHAM	David Manning (Editor): The Form of Ideology	799
	Joe McCorney: The Real World of Ideology	
S. R. PHAWTH	Erie Reole: History and Heartbreak—The Saga of Austro-Hungarian 1896-1978	800
DAVID ROBINSON	Liam O'Leary: Rex Ingram—Master of the Silent Cinema	801
D. C. WATT	J. B. Kelly: Arabia, The Gulf and the West	802
ALIC NOVE	Ronald J. Hill: Soviet Politics, Political Science and Reform	
	James H. Bator: The Soviet City	
	Paul M. White: Soviet Urban and Regional Planning	
	E. A. Prokhorov: The Crisis of Soviet Industrialization	
ALAN HILL	Commentary	
CHANCE SZINTER	The Universal Penman (Victoria and Albert Museum)	803
JONATHAN SUMPTION	The Way of a World—The Graphic Work and Poetry of Charles Tomlinson (The Arundel Gallery, Bristol)	
	The Beneficence in Britain (British Library)	
	Children's Books	
	Reviews and articles by Margaret Meek, Bridget Brophy, Naomi Lewis, Elaine Moss, Edward Blighen and others	804-805
FRANCIS HARKELL	Commentary	
GAMINI RAJAGOO	Florence and the Tuscan of the Middle in Sixteenth Century Europe	806
JULIE KAVANAGH	The D. H. Lawrence Festival, Taos, New Mexico	
	Royal Ballet, Covent Garden	807
	To the Editor	
	Among this week's contributors	
	Author, Author	808
WILLIAM WALDEGRAVE	Brian Sedgmore: The Secret Constitution—An Analysis of the Political Establishment	809
VALENTINE CUNNINGHAM	Tom Wakefield: Forties' Child	
ERIC ROLL	Peter Kellner and Lord Crowther-Hunt: The Civil Servants	810
PRISCILLA METCALP	Gerald Cobb: English Cathedrals	
	Anthony New: A Guide to the Cathedrals of Britain	811
PETER REEDGROVE AND FENELPHE SHUTTLE	Joanna Bunker Rohrbach: Women—Psychology's Puzzle	812
	Nik Douglas and Penny Slinger: Sexual Secrets—the Alchemy of Fantasy	
O. A. N. JONES	Martin Green: Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire	813
GALVIN STRAWSON	Fiction	
HAROLD DEAYER	Ian Walaun: The Gardens of Delight	814
KATE FLINT	William Faulkner: Mayday	
RICHARD BROWN	Pope Edwards: Staking Claims	
	John Kennedy Toole: A Confederacy of Dunces	815
UGO VASNAI	Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo (Editor): Poeti Italiani del Novecento	816
WENDY COPE	Adrian Burt: From the Loveless Motel	
JOHN MILLS	C. H. Sisson: Exactions	817
PATRICIA CRAIG	Fiction	
FRANK S. GUTTARA	Eva Menagen: Nothing On	818
J. J. BUNYON	Sabl H. Shapell: Five Minutes to Midnight	
	Criminal Proceedings	819

# Out of time and into poetry

By Julian Symons

JOYCE KILICK WEXLER:  
Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth  
165pp. Ohio University Press. £7.20.  
0 8214 0364 8

"Laura Riding is not well known today", Joyce Killick Wexler says in the first sentence of her book, and on the same page calls her a minor literary figure, although "there is nothing minor about her poetry". It is true that this is the first book about her work, but if one bears in mind the fact that she has published no new poems since 1939, critical attention has not been lacking, at least in this country. The reissue in 1970 of a small selection from her work produced at least three long, serious articles, by Roy Fuller in *The Review*, Michael Kirkham in *The Cambridge Quarterly* and Donald Davie in the *TLS*. It is true, however, that dramatic events in her life, mythically known about, have tended to obscure views of her work. True also, as Joyce Wexler shows, that her attempted suicide in 1929 had a vital importance in changing her approach to poetry and affecting the poems she wrote. Knowledge of the life can say nothing about the quality of the poetry, but does help to explain its nature.

Laura Reichenthal was born in New York seventy-nine years ago. Her father was an Austrian Jewish tailor of socialist sympathies, who hoped that his daughter might become an American Rosa Luxemburg; her mother was on invalid and hypochondriac. Laura became her father's intellectual companion, but in her teens repudiated his social ideas. She won three scholarships to Cornell, and married a history instructor there named Louis Gottschalk. The marriage did not last, and is omitted from her entry in *Who's Who*. When she began to publish poems in 1923 she used the name Laura Riding Gottschalk, but continued to do so until after the publication of her first book *The Close Chapter* in 1926. Riding was apparently an assumed name, although it is the one by which she has become known.

Her first strong literary association was with the group of Southern poets called the Fugitives, who awarded her their Nashville Prize in 1924. "You are the one to save America from the Edna Millays!", Allen Tate told her. There was, however, little common ground between writers who were essentially at this time fugitives from the Old South and a New Yorker of Jewish origin who was already theorizing about bringing an ideal order into life through poetry, and she stopped submitting her work to the group when some of her poems were rejected by their magazine *The Fugitive*. In 1924 Robert Graves read her poem "The Quails" with admiration, wrote to her, and after some correspondence suggested that she should come to England to collaborate with him on a book about modern poetry. She accepted, arrived in England in 1926 and began an association that lasted thirteen years.

The unconventional nature of the Graves household is suggested by the fact that Robert's wife Nancy insisted on keeping her maiden name of Nicholson. Nevertheless, the addition of a woman of that time ardently romantic in temperament must have placed a strain on this collection of three poets and four Graves children. The Riding-Graves literary partnership was launched in 1927 with *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, and the small Seizin Press was founded. Wexler tells us that for three years there was an arrangement by which Riding, Graves and Nancy Nicholson alternately cared for the children, both at a country home and on a Thames houseboat, while the Seizin Press was installed on two floors of a house in St Peter's Square. The arrangement worked well. Riding, Graves and Nicholson were able to pursue their interests separately when relieved of responsibility for the children, yet they could spend time together when they chose.

Late in 1928 or early in the following year a serpent entered this triangular Eden, in the form of

a young Irishman named Geoffrey Phibbs. The short story writer Frank O'Connor has left a vivid portrait of Phibbs in his autobiography *My Father's Son*. He was the eldest son of a Sligo landowner, "tall and thin and dark, with a long lock of black hair that fell over one eye, a stiff, abrupt manner, and a rather insolent air". There was, O'Connor thought, something vaguely satanic about Phibbs, but "he had a sort of animal beauty and a touch of animal cruelty". Later, when I read Proust, I knew exactly what Saint-Loup must have looked like. Phibbs read a great deal of modern poetry and, although married to an attractive Irish painter, admired above all other poets "an American woman of whom we were both to learn a great deal more". O'Connor calls her only "the Woman poet", contrary to what Wexler suggests, but she has been identified elsewhere, particularly in T. S. Matthews's *Jackie or Better*.

According to Laura Riding, Phibbs wanted to become part of the household after only a single visit to St Peter's Square. He had poetic credentials of a kind not mentioned by Wexler nor, strangely enough, by O'Connor, who regarded him as at this time an Englishman's closest friend. His first—and only—collection of poems, *It Was Not I*, had recently been published as the second volume in the new "Hogarth Living Poets" series. The publication was pseudonymous, and the name of the publisher, "Hogarth", was a pseudonym. Phibbs and his wife were typical of Phibbs in their blend of mock-grandeur and ironic deflation. It was not I who seems to have died unnoticed, yet these are original and entertaining minor poems, some of which are quite good. Phibbs comes through in the dedication, to Saint Thomas Aquinas, a dry well where, while Phibbs was in the house, he would have seen himself mirrored as a lion.

Phibbs became part of the household. His acceptance was a relief for disaster, if one bears in mind the comic view of life shown in the *Plays* poems and the seriousness of *Graves and Riding*. O'Connor, paying them a visit one day, was shaken to find that "the woman poet" disapproved of smoking, and must not be disturbed while working. This subservience seemed to O'Connor astonishing on the part of an atheist and revolutionary whom he thought possessed by "satanic pride", and it did not last long. Phibbs, suddenly reconciled with his wife, went to Rouen.

The two poets and Nicholson followed, urging him to return. Phibbs did so, but only to say that he no longer wanted to be part of the ménage. Riding, according to Wexler, "had come to regard Phibbs as someone who provided serious companionship in terms of her work and who shared her highest values", so that without him she

was unable to write. When Phibbs rejected them all finally, she stepped out of a child's room window. She broke her back, and was unconscious for several days. Phibbs went to see her in hospital, and when she was back in the household for good, by leaving his wife and going off with Nicholson. The couple returned to Ireland, but the Sligo landowner refused to have Nancy Nicholson in the house. Phibbs in protest changed his name to Taylor, and as Geoffrey Taylor became known as a minor poet of the 1930s, and later as an anthologist, in particular of Ireland. After Riding's recovery—although for use a came—she and Nicholson went to live in Deyra, Majorca.

The departure must have been a conscious break with the past, yet she still felt the need to write about it. The preface to *Poems*, a *Joking Word* (1930) describes Phibbs (not by name) as "the Devil who was also Jesus", and mentions a battle between "truth" and "under-handness" after which "I left that room, by the window of course, and poems came with me. Or rather I went with poems". At about the same time she mentioned the "mystic" in a prose piece called "Obsession", although the actual happenings are hidden by a prose that becomes more obscure the longer you look at it.

Laura seeks for "this gift of nihilism to make which I take upon myself the pain of permanence". Robert's "reaches in pain", a gift sought for, a gift of pain, "pleasure", "pleasure", "pleasure" are mentioned. Phibbs appears as "the Nunquam" who "made an accusation of Laura to the police when he thought her dying of pneumonia". Phibbs had been seen from a window, but he had never far her. He said: She was and she thought herself God. No. She is not, she thinks herself Laura.

The meaning of "Obsession", so far as it can be seen, is not through the tortuous simplicities of the Steinian prose patterns, is that now Laura has been revealed by the jump from the window, one no longer dependent upon other people but wholly individual. "And Robert, you say, 'He still will not be your prisoner again'. I will not be your prisoner again. It is suggested—everything here is suggested rather than directly said—that a further reality, a holy or at least superior madness, has been attained through the step or jump. I feared heights, with the same fear by which I was able to leap down a height, and I feared death with the same fear by which I was able to die. And this I did with such ease that you would not, to know me, call me dead. Perhaps you would call me mad. Indeed, if you will not call me dead, I do not see how you can help calling me mad." There is a glance at the complexity of being a Jew, but that is rejected in favour of being Laura. "I have not forgotten how but only not for

guinea Laura".) Mysticism is similarly rejected. ("No, I am not a mystic, I am Laura.") Laura, who has endured death, and who may now be the foolish he called mad, knows the future business of her life. "What business? Laura. How can Laura be a business? How can she not? Complete obsession. Never before, now at last". Obsession is necessary: obsession is love, truth, poetry.

So far my interpretation of "Obsession", which may well be unacceptable to Laura Riding herself. Wexler tells us that after returning on friendly terms with Riding for three years, the poet "broke communication with me" after reading on early draft of this book, asking why interpretations were necessary at all, whether her own words were not good enough. She has often said that she wishes to be taken literally, but her presentation makes this impossible. Although any given sentence may be simple, each paragraph is highly elusive. When Hart Crane, with whom she was friendly, learnt that she found his poems difficult, he said that it was nothing to the obscurity he found in hers. But however one reads "Obsession", it is clear that the fall from the window was a crucial event in her life and work. "Once she recovered, she treated her fall as an act of will that had allowed her to shed her personal identity and enter a universal state of being", Wexler says. Both her ideas about poetry and her poems changed greatly in the following decade.

First, the ideas. Joyce Wexler quotes from an article written in 1925 called "A Prophecy or a Plea", which outlined a conception of poetry that might roughly be called metaphysical, and that could be achieved through what Riding called self-exercise. The poet would not be shaped by life, but would rather reshape it. The poet would be concerned with meaning, but

meaning is a horribly rhetorical and poetical since it is a barren life reborn, touched and shaded with accent, influenced with its own soul and muddled into a form of poetry or an eternal form that is a symbol of peace and reconciliation between the inner nature of man and the external world without him. This is an unexceptionable, and perhaps hardly exceptional, statement of the view that the poet should consult himself rather than "the external world" in creating a poem. By 1938, when her *Collected Poems* were published, she had moved to a position where poetry was seen as the pursuit of inner truth, and a poem was valid only if it expressed such truth. If her poems were collected difficult, it was because they were read for the wrong reasons. "Most people read poems in order to be inspired with emotions which differ from their ordinary emotions only in being more exaggerated, and to any illusions which their ordinary life does not permit." Those were wrong reasons, caused by miseducation.

What then were right ones? Refusing the list of them which (rightly) she thought a reader might ask for, she offered instead "poems written for all the seasons of poetry", which, if read as they ought to be, would show that "existence in poetry becomes more real than existence in time—more real because more gnarl, more good because more true". Poetry is truth to the self; truth to the self in the good existence.

This conclusion had been reached after a decade of astonishing activity, including the acutely intelligent essays about Poe, T. E. Hulme and others in *Contemporaries* and *Snobs* (1928), the gnostic optimism about art in *Aurichium* (1928), the fantasy of *Experiments in Poetry* (1930), and the essays and articles in *Erythraea*, the hard-cover magazine published from Deyra during the Thirties. As early as 1928 she had answered the question "What is a Poem?" with the answer "A poem is nothing", but now her intense energy was designed to show that a poem was something. It was an expression of ultimate truth, and with the years it became plainer to her that she was a teller of such truths.

The messianic note, perhaps sounded first when she asserted that the fall had been an act of will, was clear by the mid-1930s. Around her in Majorca (Graves in this played a very secondary role) there gathered at different times a host of various fantasists of *Experiments in Poetry*: John Aldridge, Jacob Bronowski, Norman Cameron, Alan Hodge, James Reeves, Honor Wyatt. Such friends were expected to conform to her standards of writing and behaviour, or why were they her friends? Wexler, who is respectful but not reverent, quotes a remark made to James Reeves that "he might be shocked to be praised, but she felt those who left her love truth", and mentions a warning given to Alan Hodge, who was then writing for *Erythraea*, that he should not submit work to other magazines. It is not surprising that almost all these relationships ended in estrangement. *The World and I* (1938), a work of breathtaking absurdity, is the climax of her attempt to collect the world's errors by influencing its thinking. She addressed an open letter to friends and acquaintances, inviting them to state their views on the world, and printed their replies. Any idea of action to check the *Experiments* thus spreading from one European country to another was altogether ruled out.

Peace does not come before order but after it. Order is not achieved by taking action, but by taking thought.

And after expressing her belief in the power of words, she said simply: "If none of this seems practical, I am sorry: it should be so." If the Riding attitude sounds impressively arrogant, that is the impression it often made upon outsiders—two instances upon me, in a single meeting to which Wexler gives more attention than she should. She notes that Riding objected to what I wrote about the meeting on the ground of my "personal animosity" against her—animosity that Riding will no doubt join as mistakenly said in this article. Seen from the inside view, of course, she was the repository of truths towards which she tried to lead others. But to say that her attitude was arrogant and often ridiculous? "If what I suggest is practical, so which the worse for practicality?" is by no means to say that it was without value as an approach to poetry.

Almost from the beginning she was concerned with the reshaping and purification of language. "The beauty of words was a tough look for a school", to use a phrase from one of her letters to me, must be eliminated; or as she put it in an essay on poetry and music, music is an instrument for reshaping emotion, while poetry is not an instrument and is one written with the intention of arousing emotions—unless of a hybrid music-poetical breed. The searching and witty distinctions she made between poetry and music, painting, dreams, left her saying: "The end of a poem is the poem." It was, and out of

## Hands and Mouth

Obedient as bombardiers, the ruthless hands  
Cover the protesting mouth, deaf  
To its reasons. They have always known  
Themselves to be, at last, the more  
Intelligent. Imagine a mouth  
Playing a piano! Or plastering!  
No more food, mouth: those are  
Orders. Just shut your trap.  
If you have something to say, we  
Will help you write it.

Mouth exposed a row of chipped enamel  
Tiles and ivory like an iceberg.  
The hymn of its maddening desires.  
For a little while the hands clung  
To the waist. Then with a vast surging  
They slide down the long funnel  
Into the contented belly of the sea.  
Long afterwards a bottle appears at the foot  
Of the bed filled with cryptic messages:  
We are happy. Come and rescue us. Beware.

Tom Disch



nothing by a nobody—made out of a socially non-existent element in language.

Towards this socially non-existent element she worked, gradually removing the luxury-stubs of metaphor and simile, working through delay, lags rather than distortions of syntax, through rhythms that became more subtle and less emphatic as she progressed, above all through increasingly simplified repetitions of phrase and opposition of meaning. What she says is almost always seen freshly, often as it might be seen by an innocent or an extraordinarily intelligent and perceptive child. "Because of Clothes" begins:

Withon brassmakers to connect  
The good-will of the body  
With the purpose of the head,  
We should be two worlds  
Instead of a world and its shadow  
The 1.

The poem proceeds through six of these stanzas, with a distinct progression in each. Head is one world and body another, "the divergence being corrupted in dress". The thought breeds several reflections. There is a "dour of Christ" in the cloth. Knowledge is one thing, appearance another. The last stanza runs:

Wherefore, by the neutral grace  
Of the needle, we possess our triumph  
Together with our defeats  
In a single balanced comment:  
We pause between sense and foolishness,  
And live.

The comparisons are elegantly put yet serious, the poem grows more complex and interesting the more often it is read. No wonder Auden called her "the only living poetess". She has been called the "typical" poetess, saying that "my muse is, presumably, Philosophy, as his is Politics". Yet it does not seem wrong or limiting to call "Because of Clothes" a philosophical poem. Like much of the work it proceeds by oppositions: between body/head, clothes/nakedness, sense/foolishness. The repeated and elegantly varied phrases that she uses elsewhere can be astonishingly effective. "Fine Fellow Sows a Poor Follow", begins "Every poor fellow reminds me of my father", and goes on to vary the phrase. Everybody is a poor fellow or a fine fellow, everybody has good or bad luck, although "All luck is luck or perhaps no luck". The poem's rhythm is strongly reminiscent of rounde used by children, and it ends:

A poor fellow and a fine fellow  
And bad luck and good luck  
And father and son  
Are no fellow, no luck, no blood  
But a false life-line  
Between what is more than poor  
And what is less than fine.

Worke's book is an excellent introduction to the work and provides a useful brief biography. It should be read along with the *Selected Poems*, issued in 1970 and still in print. She analyses several poems with perception and sympathy, like the early "John and I" where "I" is the living poet, and "John" the poetic creation, and the poem is designed to combine her story about John and his tribulation with her own thoughts about the limits of her ability to know another individual. Worke doesn't, however, comment on the significant changes made between the version in *The Class Choptel* and that in *Collected Poems*. In the first version the poet asks forgiveness if she "suffered" in taking liberties with John's And poetry by making him outlast himself till now. The later version puts it differently:

If I suffered upon the laws of art  
By making John outlast himself till now.

It was to save him from the consequences of his generic artfulness and false-ness—  
Defection, malice and oblivion.  
The laws of art? Could I not alter them?

"I" has become more important, John and his story, and by implication the importance of knowing other individuals, less so. The poem has not been damaged, but it has been changed in accordance with the poet's later attitude.

"John and I" is written in standard iambic pentameter, and is no exception. More generally Riding uses, as Roy Fuller has said, a four-beat line diversified with a many different variations (complicated often by repetitions of phrases) but it is seen in immediate retrospect.

These language issues in *The Class Choptel*, for example in the "Samuel" poems, that were taken from the craft, she deprecates.

reprinted, has a richness and exuberance lacking later on, although some poems in this first collection show the strictness that Auden admired in her. There are marvellous openings: "The outer mind of passion is through a door, Opening inward." "No more are level places/And Tai-Mahal is still." "His critics, in their thin and early tentacles/Pronounced him, fat and ferri, a wonder-child." And there is, here and in many of the later poems, a playfulness of a fairy-tale kind that does not at all imply a relaxation of intellectual acuity. "The Quids", for example, is "about" the relationship between atoms and the universe, but the way in which it is written makes it a light and funny poem.

Like almost all of the successful work "The Quids" tells a kind of story, offers a narrative progression. The work of the 1930s shows a slow turning away from most of the things that had made her work memorable. The wonderful eloquence and styliness of the long poem on Voltaire which she wrote at the age of twenty, the rewarding density of many early poems, become to her view almost positive vices, certainly dangerous traps. The work of the later 1930s, the "Poems Continual" section in the collected volume, shows—with exceptions like "Because of Clothes"—a juice being drained from the language, sleekening of rhythms so that they become neater prose, almost complete renunciation of rhyme.

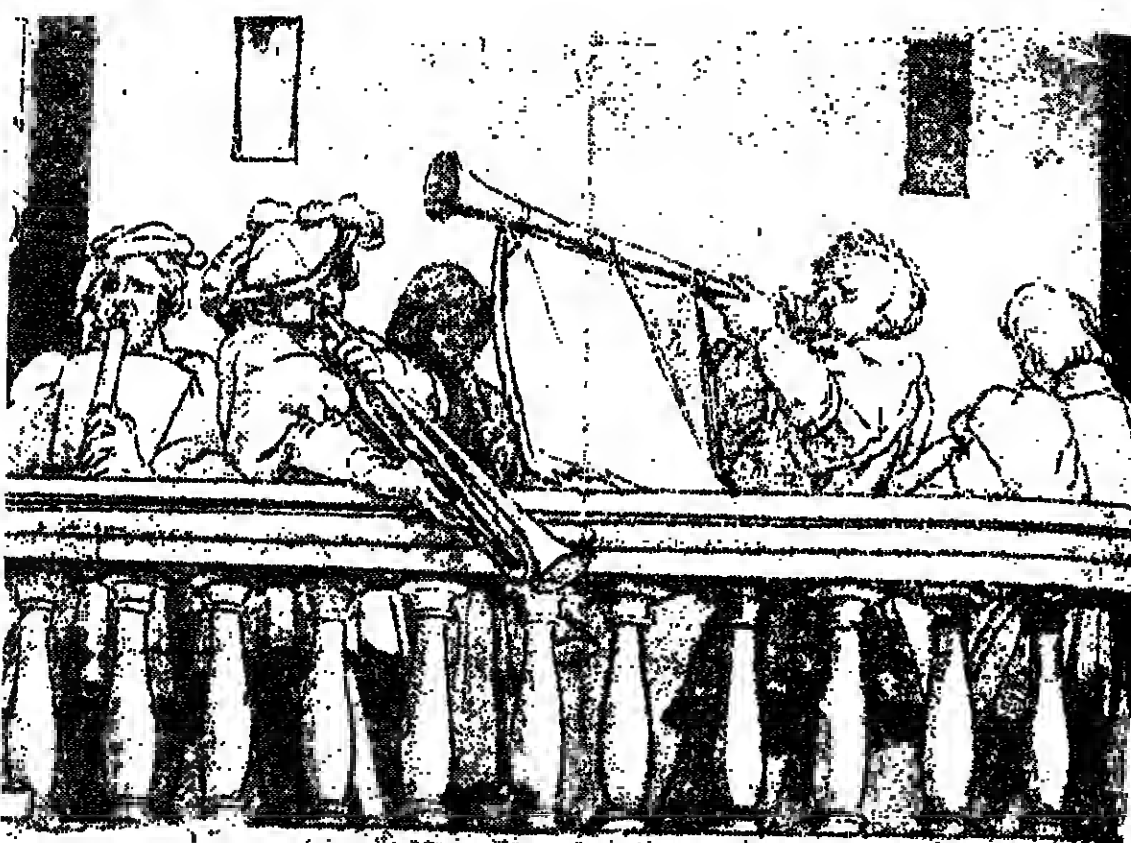
She spells out the reasons clearly in this preface to the collection of 1970, in explaining her abandonment of poetry. (Most of the early work has been excluded from this selection.) She had become, she says, of a discrepancy between the creed and the craft of poetry that led her to see "the impossibility of anyone's functioning with consistency to the character of poetry". The work of the means, moral perfection of a kind that she had thought might be reached through poetry, by craft the technical skills of rhythm and rhyme. The poetic mode was sacred, the craft mere technique, a kind of veneer. The poet's virtues, she seems to be saying, are blessed with success because the results appear to be "good" poems, the actual tinkering being concealed under carefully mixed and applied literary polish, a polish given to the reader out of old friend/enemy of the luxury-stab, which she knows besides myself and my husband. Bebelvior... who has put feet across the margin on the further ground—the margin being the knowledge that truth begins where poetry ends. Or Laura Riding's poetry ends.

The rest of her personal story may be briefly told. Riding and Graves parted, and in 1941 she married Schuyler Jackson, who when poetry editor of *Time* had called her the only living poet able to perform the poet's true function of making words make sense. Since her marriage she has collected herself Laura (Riding) Jackson, although the reason for this brackets the name of her husband. She and Jackson lived in Florida, growing citrus fruit and working on a dictionary that would define the meanings of words, so that they "could be used with perfect truthfulness".

Something of the break-up in the Riding-Graves household, and of later scenes, has been put down by another ex-*Time* bend, T. S. Matthews, who spent a period with them in Majorca, and was by the way, a close friend and disciple. Mr. Matthews is not the kind of friend one would choose as an obituarist, but if a quote of his is allowed to account to accuracy, it confirms the destructive quality of Laura Riding's personality.

Jackson died in 1969, with Riding's last poem, *A New Foundation for the Definition of Words*, still incomplete. In her latest *Who's Who* entry the book is said to be "in the process of publication arrangements pending". In 1972 Laura (Riding) Jackson published *Telling a Work of Impenetrable Abstraction about the One and the Many: truth and falsehood, interaction in its confirmation of the Bible*. In its style as poet owed to the Bible. Some later notes, and an addendum chiefly about the nature of poetic vision, are valuable for a further understanding of her attitude and development.

At the end one is left not with the creed but the craft, with the poems. The final impression must be of a poet of original genius spoiled, yet the best of her is extraordinary. It is a pity that she was a mistress of the craft, she deprecates.



"A Bond of Wind-Players on a Balcony", c. 1540, attributed to Hans Holbein. An illustration to "The Wind-Players on a Balcony", c. 1540, attributed to Hans Holbein. An illustration to "The Wind-Players on a Balcony", c. 1540, attributed to Hans Holbein. An illustration to "The Wind-Players on a Balcony", c. 1540, attributed to Hans Holbein.

## Serving the imagination

By Colin Macleod

W. B. STANFORD:  
*Essays of Poetry*  
181pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
£8.95.  
0 7100 0460 5

To this book W. B. Stanford, as a later-day Sidney or Shelley, does better with an ample collection of "essays of poetry", among whom the reader will find a list of the most prominent. The bulk of it is concerned with those, many of them literary scholars, who have tried to define poetry in the name of history, science, philosophy or morality. If then goes on in layman's no less than in poet's language, to discuss the "essays of poetry", it is a particular way in which poetry can be discussed; and he concludes with a brief of the trumpet proclaiming the "freedom" of the inexpressible daimon.

Professor Stanford is no Don Quixote: not only is the whole book pervaded by a refreshing love of his subject, but it also scores a good many hits. However, he is himself open to criticism on a number of counts. Some of these may be conveniently dealt with under two headings: (1) whom or what should he be rebutting? (2) how should he conduct his defence?

In the first chapter he writes: "Since my aim is to persuade rather than to provoke I have avoided the reference to the poet's name. One should appreciate the poet's spirit of this declaration; but it points to a defect in the book. For example, on pages 27 to 31 he shrewdly criticizes some of the in-justice done by 'anthropologists' to Homer. But the writings in question appeared in 1907 and 1914. It is true that the notion of Homer as a kind of Moses-cum-Jesus is not dead; but what have our classical anthropologists been up to since then?

If we are looking for fallacies rather than insights, we might turn to the contemporary interest in myth. One result of this has been the study of say the "Cyclops myth", ignoring, or mulling, its actual manifestations in literature—which are, moreover, strikingly various—in order to squeeze out its supposed meaning.

Structure and printed page have all their love, and not those things that they are abstract of.

(Brian Vickers's *Towards a Greek Tragedy* was a valuable corrective.) A comparable error in Homeric studies, one form of which Stanford does attack, he talking about "the Homeric" rather than the poems. Homer vanishes into the "areal poet", a figure who seems to be

no longer a poet at all, let alone a great one.

Again: to consider Stanford's strictures on scientists. As he himself observes, "scientific factuality is less in fashion". This is surely because science no longer means what it meant a hundred years ago. If modern poetry has often shown up a puzzling and troubling world, so has modern science. The "natural laws" become more probabilities; the hut-house flowers of pure mathematics (whose affinities with poetry Stanford briefly discusses) become the latest theory of portables; and if there is scientific progress, it does not seem to be on an orderly Victorian manner.

The feud between science and poetry is a heritage from the nineteenth century: Keats's "Lamia" was a prophetic work. But as fends to it, he has less his reason for existing; and to see why is more instructive than simply to recall it.

Nero Stanford might have spared his sword-arm. But he should have challenged the more enemies of poetry, very much alive today, those who build on its behalf third-rate arguments as a surrogate for careful enquiry and sheer judgment. Two examples of their work are in fact quoted with approval by Stanford himself. One is a passage from Oscar Wilde which says no more than "poetry is beyond criticism in tedious and beautiful prose". The other is one of the few blonisms on a very fine book, Auerbach's *Mimesis*. Here Auerbach tells us that "the Homeric poems conceal nothing, they contain no teaching and no secret meaning". I do not see why secrecy should be a precondition of greatness; and there is no lack of overt teaching in Homer; think of the very summit of the *Iliad*, Achilles' admonition to Priam in Book Twenty-Four. Nor is there any lack of subtlety: Auerbach forgets that Odysseus has given offence to tidy-minded scholars who often cheerfully go on celebrating Homeric poetry rather as he does.

One might also wish that Stanford had broken a lance with some more distinguished or less pedantic scholars than the ones he usually chooses; for to reflect on what is missing in a great man's work is far more rewarding than to rebut the errors of inferior minds. One great Hellas who draws on both anthropology and psychology was E. R. Dodds. (He was still alive when this book was being written.) What he justly admired *The Greeks and the Irrational* does not bring out is that the irrational, of its very nature, can never be thoroughly understood or controlled, and that earlier Greek literature—epic, tragedy, comedy, history—is a profound and religiously conscious representation

of this fact. The tale begins with the "wrath" of Achilles, a struggle in his own savage or egoistic impulses, and then renouncing this in face the immensity of his life and the emptiness of his life. It is an adequate study of the Greeks and the irrational, as Hugh Lloyd-Jones, in *The Justice of Zeus* made clear, must include a searching account of their greatest literature; and indeed the difficulties of Homer's rationalism, critics often argue, cause Homer to be not himself so fused (or interpenetrated), but some people acting or suffering in the normal human state of confusion and ignorance.

Stanford, to his credit, is no afraid to say why he believes in poetry; but his is a satisfying pursuit from which to defend. The difficulty may be put by considering how far he has answered the greatest of all enemies of poetry, Plato. The nub of Plato's argument was that poetry deceives the mind and saps the conscience; the defender must show that the poet's truth and idealism go on. About the truth of poetry Stanford has a colourful collection of things to say: rather than imitating nature, it "recreates" it, it is "a vehicle of transcendent truth", and it represents "people doing things". I think that all these assertions are essentially true; but if they are to defend poetry, we need to be told just how they can all be true at once.

But more important is that, in a way, Plato is inescapable. Poetry can always deceive because it helps us to escape certain realities; and it flatters partly because it is a human need. Is it enough to reply that it is natural to seek the pleasures of art and painless, or worse, to reject them? Likewise, even if the pleasure poetry gives is not necessarily harmful and even if it may sometimes effect a mental "catharsis", still feeling for art can foster moral squalor; and Homer himself showed us what the Sirens could do. Perhaps the best answer to Plato was Shelley's: poetry serves the imagination, and the imagination can and should feed an understanding which includes moral consciousness. This is also part of Horace's argument in the *Epistles* and *Tristis* Murdock's in *The Fire and the Sun*; but they are more clearly than Stanford's there to so inescapable element in Plato's criticisms. In the end, the best defender of poetry is not its advocate, but its critic, though the critic will also be, like Plato, a lover.

But it would be unjust to end a review of this book trying to show where it fails. It is a warm, lively and thoughtful piece of writing, full of vivid illustration and anecdote, and it will surely give comfort and pleasure to any who feel the philistine upon them.

## MYTHOLOGY

CHARLES KINGSLEY:

*The Heroes*  
Illustrated by H. M. Brock.  
224pp. Macmillan, 14.95.  
0 333 29053 5

ROGER LANCELYN GREEN:  
*Heroes of Greece and Troy*  
331pp. Bodley Head, £4.50.  
0 370 01272 9

"Among retellings for young readers", writes Mr Roger Lancelyn Green in the preface to *Heroes of Greece and Troy*, "only *The Heroes* . . . has become a real classic."

A nostalgic-looking reprint of a handsome edition of Kingsley's book, first published in 1928 and adorned with illustrations by H. M. Brock which could hardly be more typical of the children's books of that period, gives one the sensation of a first reading of the book. I do not greatly care for *The Heroes* as a book, but before rereading my recollections of it were not wholly favourable.

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# Classical tales romantically retold

By Hugh Lloyd-Jones

Among ancient authors, Kingsley's account of the voyage of the Argonauts on the episode of their visit to Lemnos, where, some time before the women had done away with all the men, and of the "love-in", to use G. S. Kirk's expression, that took place. Medea's revenge on Jason is alluded to, but the focus of the story is on the Argonauts' journey, which Kingsley starts with a sermon on the wrongness of doing things for money, into which Christ and the Apostles, Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale are irreverently dragged, and the awful warning conveyed by the ends of Jason and Theseus is put across in a way that reminds one of the same author's *Hereward the Wake*. But in general Kingsley keeps a high rein on this Victorian tendency.

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comment lies in propagating the notion that capitalist society is natural and inevitable.

**By Kenneth Minogue**

**JOE McCARNEY :**  
**The Real World of Ideology**  
 160pp. Harvester. £12.50.  
 0 85527 866 8

For Isherwood, disenchanted Western exile, it was perhaps essential that the rituals and metaphors for the route towards the Timelies should come from an alien civilization which his own people had violated. He has not been alone in finding this route attractive.

in the surveys the culture of the 1960s and 1970s, he appears in the vanguard of those who have tried to make a marriage of Western energy and activity with a traditionally Eastern transcendence of the quotidian. The danger of this marriage is that its obsession with escape from the ego leads, paradoxically, to a suffocating absorption with self. Even the most ethic-ridden brands of Christianity—which Iherwood particularly disliked—would not

accord the individual more importance and more dignity than does Isherwood's comparatively etc. free faith.

But although it would be difficult to draw a rigid distinction between Isherwood the "disciple" and Isherwood the novelist, *A Simple Man* and *Christopher and His Kind* both major personal documents of our time, seem to me to derive most from strengths of personality Isherwood learnt in pre-war exiled Europe and sustained by the liberal humanism to which many of his closest associates at the time—Forster, Virginia Woolf,

Stephen Spender - subscribed. It was his hatred of organized society's ability to limit the individual, to deny the importance of some of his strongest desires and yearnings, that led in his courageous, multi-layered social apostasy and which had nourished his fiction.

The Ishwerband of Sri Gurmukhi's Discipline which we read while to salute the Ishwerband of his publishing pages—seems in its love for the world to have been born of the failures of his past and built of certainty and the immortality of death.

Meanwhile my life is still boundful to me—formidably because I know those of us who are so certain of our efforts to define my life experience in my writing, because of my interest in the various predicaments of my fellow travellers in the journey of life. And I never cease to assure them that all is ultimately well—particularly those who are quite certain that it isn't; that life is meaningless and unjust—and I reassure them, because they can't speak with the absolute authority of a knower.

# The Middle Ground

## Margaret Drabble

**'A fair and lively piece  
of social observation'**  
—*Sunday Telegraph*

**'The quintessential Margaret Drabble . . . a Mrs Gaskell for our days' — *Observer***

must be integrated into the Christian Inheritance of God.

Teilhard's distinctive vision was of a "mysticism of action" closely interwoven with human experience in general, integrating love of God with love of a world in evolution. It was at the points where Eastern religions seemed to compromise this vision; in nihilism or in indifference to the world, that Teilhard's censure was severest.

De Klmg may be correct in hinting that Tallhard's life (the Chinese gave him the name *Perfur Day-break Virtue*) and correspondence, which he had with a construct and ponderously self-conscious philosopher in philosophical theology, may provide a better clue to his mystical outlook. But questions must be put to the Chinese scholar as to the actual Christology of Incarnation likely to serve as the centre of a convergence of living religions? Does Tallhard's thought contain the theme of unification really taking place in the birth-born variety of religious forms and the recurring conflict between conservative and modernizing tendencies in all religions? What applicable difference does the application of action make to living amid the affluence of this world? Does it have anything upon the structural confusion of the world and its development? Does it hold a religious

If, towards the end of the book Dr King sometimes appears theologically ill-at-ease and insufficiently hard-headed in exploring the implications of Teilhard's mysticism, this is not her principal theme and it is no way detracted from the quality of her achievement in the main body of the text. The description and analysis of sources are masterly. Her interpretations and her interpretation of other interpreters, seems well-nigh definitive.

The treatment of Teilhard by the Roman Catholic authorities is again demonstrated as hardly pardonable and serves as a solemn warning to those who officially scrutinize the work of contemporary Roman Catholic thinkers. This distinguished paleontologist is remarkably in the vanguard of his age, and his work is a model of precision.

It would be difficult to find a greater contrast than these two books on ideology. They differ in style, content, and import. They illustrate the extent to which discussion of the whole subject is a dialogue of the deaf. Yet there are connections between them, and it becomes possible in the end to see them as distinct but other, even though one is Wittgenstein with a distant echo of Marx, while the other is the reverse.

David Manning has for some years conducted a graduate seminar

on ideology at the University of Durham. Members of that seminar have been able to present different aspects of a common point of view, and *The Form of Ideology* is the result. It is a somewhat difficult book to read, but its conclusions are very considerably in weight. The strength of a collaboration on this basis is obviously coherence; it is also, I think, a certain amount of knowing so well a point of view that they often have been hammered out.

On the face of it, at least, this is absurd, and its plausibility is not greatly helped by a few casual references about the application of the communist idea of revolution in the real world. Ideological talk, unlike legal talk, we are told, does not have to be about the real world.<sup>1</sup> The political believer, of course, thinks that it does, but mind the Meinings! view such talk as a mere verbal exercise, nothing more than group solipsism.

Unanchored jargonisms and jerky transitions of thought create some patches of fog, but a clear Wittgensteinian treatment of the subject shines.

The value of the book lies in its application of myriatic arguments to the sociological theory of ideology, by which thought is understood in terms of social distortion. L. G. Gribanov, for example, presents a kind of "epitaph" for the "bourgeois" assumption that to identify the kind of belief which men hold may, in certain circumstances, amount to exploiting why they hold them". Our human, he argues, establish in advance of any inquiry the rationality of beliefs simply by reference to what is thought to be the material or prudential consequences of holding them. David Manning usefully cuts this confusion between rationality and causality by writing on ideology. D. H. Roschke has some good advice about the

misuse of knock-down argument, clearly salutary for a style of philosophy which tends to develop by taking potshots in bits of argument trailed by J. G. A. Pocock, Alisdair MacIntyre and others.

The best entry into the dominant theme lies in its concern with what it is to philosophize. Mannheim and Co sometimes seem like a set of self-appointed referees trying to establish rules of order in the bar-room brawl of ideological contention. They have a very rarefied notion of philosophy, so refined, indeed, that the whole idea of ideology dangers for its wide susceptibility to the edge of ontological nihilism never is finally accepted as a highly conditional

status." Given the many defects in the theory, Manning tells us, "it is not clear that there is anything left to be given an account of." And he illustrates this situation with the example of the philosophy of science, in which the failure of philosophers to produce an account of science would not for a moment cast doubt upon the reality of science. Ideology, by contrast with science, is a swarm of variable ideas lacking any internal consistency. Still, philosophy recovers here as a rational construction and reconstruction of a form of thought, does eventually manage to dredge up "a possible understanding that has a certain degree of coherence and unity and which we may term ideology." Kicking away ladders of ideology, he says, is a plea for understanding. It is all very well, but

the footnotes in *The Real World of Ideology* are bunched at the end of one footnote or another. Books frequently referred to in these footnotes do appear in their initial, resulting in pages that read like no other. It is a weird kind of other report. Fortunately, most of the verbiage is unnecessary, thus making

his argument with admirable clarity and drive. Abstract analogies in the upper reaches of thought.

His book is the result of a conviction that the true Marxist theory of ideology has fallen into confusion, perhaps as a result of its theoretical development in the West, where it has come to be considered from political practice. Two causes are given for this: the first, suitable hardens under which the idea of ideology has come to labour. What McCorvey calls the burden of social theory is constituted by the fact that ideology is expected to explain how whole societies cohere, and the epistemological burden is that it is expected to explain defective thought. He assembles a set of arguments from

Marx himself, supplements them with Lenin and Lukács, who are thought to have developed the true insights, and prescine a theory of ideology. This theory is a class theory, a theory of class interests. Whether the thought is good or bad does not, for this purpose, matter. The concern with false consciousness is banished from the concept, which now finds its true place as part of the theory of the class struggle.

This is to take what is probably the more satisfactory side of a difficult issue and to leave the Marxist thought on this question. For the Marxist view of ideology can be taken either as a sociological theory of the way thought is distorted by its social origin, which generates problems of self-reference and which only an immanent critique could resolve, or as a handout could explain. Marxist

And indeed some defence in depth of this kind is necessary since a great deal of the argument consists of an assemblage of what fired Lakatos' imagination to call monster theories, theories which are the very of insulating an argument from challenge. Ideology is not necessarily thought which has originated in a class, nor does it necessarily help the interests of the class, nor is it necessarily distorted thought, nor is it necessarily ideologically. The only thing that is necessary about it is the connection with the class struggle, and the only definitive utterances about this connection are those made by Marx and Lenin and presumably by their successors. The course of Manning is entirely right: what we have here is the articulation of a closed world.

This can be seen in the sheer carelessness in any actual application of the theory to explain a form of capitalism which has not yet revealed to us the secrets of our society, and this is evident in minute detail in the analysis of the bourgeoisie mystifying, seeing through smoke screens and the rest. If we thus see through the work of the clerical bourgeoisie, McCarthy

He is enabled to do this by declaring that his terms of reference are simply the Marxist tradition of thought, and hence he need not be explicitly concerned with the real world at any point. On the other hand, he claims to do this consistently. The title, after all, promises us the moon—the real world of ideology, and by page 97 at least the distinction between talking about Marxist thought and talking about the world seems to have disappeared. "The real world of ideology is class society and class conflict, and it disappears from the historical stage with the close of the epoch which is characterized

Interestingly enough, the context of this conclusion is a rejection of Althusser's view that ideology is a cohesive set of beliefs which will always be necessary in human society, even under communism. That Althusser should have arrived at this conclusion, even if only temporarily in the course of his "big intellectual frenzy," has always seemed to me to be a great tribute to the power of human rationality, for it amounts to a rediscovery of the classical theory of rhetoric which had been originally bewailed by the brutal simplifications of early Marxist theory. McCerney will have no truck at all with this, even

though his own view seems to me to be a similar rediscovery from another point of view. What is striking about this nexus of argument is that Althusser's theory of ideology is identical with Manning's: "In ideology [Althusser wrote] the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that is necessarily conservative, conformist, reformist (or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality." This agreement about the nature of ideology is, of course, pretty superficial, since Althusser would think of himself as a scientist while Manning would regard him as an ideologist. But it is significant on all the same.

McCann tells us that the ideological status of ideas has nothing to do with where the ideas originate.

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comment lies in propagating the notion that capitalist society is natural and inevitable.

For "if bourgeois relations of production are indeed the natural, historical, unessentially human, social arrangements, then, of course, the Praxis that seeks to abolish them is against nature and is doomed to fail." But it is certainly not to be a secret unmasked, since apart from the question of whether it has anything to do with the actual views of Adam Smith, Ricardo and the rest, it is a pretty tame little bourgeois theory. At the same time, it does provoke the thought of a Dudd and Pete sketch. "Not much chance of a revolution, y'know, Dud?" "Why not, Pete?" "Blame here says the capitalist mode of production exists in the mind, and the point is in a more solemn fashion the fundamental mistake of Marxism lies in the belief that there is only one correct thought corresponding to every supposedly real situation—which is, on precisely the same line as the old saying in Marx's preface, that the idea is always dominant first, then the capitalist roaders, then the Goups of Four, find themselves up against the wall, without even the possibility of discovering a civilizational manner of theoretic discussion, or any practical way of dialogue or conversation, or development.

There is thus a certain poignance in McCrerny's book. It is, for those with the taste for this subject, a interesting and lively argument by an able thinker, even if his concern is with a somewhat limited and unuse one of his own pejoratives in a non-pejorative sense, scholasticism. At the end he recognizes that the Marxian tradition in Britain has been doomed to a certain pechlicity and that it would benefit from nino contact with the mainstream of British intellectual life. This is clearly a laudable aim. But he tells us that this intention has meant "in effect the giving up of any nhibition to take part in the hegemonic contest; that is, to engage in the struggle for the mastery of the field of theory." And at this point the heart sinks. No question of intellectual playfulness, no operation of ideas, in ranging the field of theory, but the truth: just dull, arduous hegemony and an incessant wrestling bout.

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The women in Professor Rahbhah's are puppets of society, and have little inner life; the Tacticism of Douglas and Slinger are self-determining, and rather full of themselves. To the latter, introspection and imagination are all-important and closely defined as techniques, while Professor Rahbhah's book has a rather restless sense of such things despite the fact that much of what she does discuss is conditioned by the imaginations of society and individuals about gender.

His "yang-force" can certainly be  
neercome and coerce the woman  
but so can the "yin-force" of the  
woman short-circuit the man. The  
secret is said to be in the "wielding  
of these two essences; in learning  
androgyny. Woman, we are told,  
is inexhaustibly sexual, but not  
masochistic, and man can learn  
to use his yin, or falls to her  
lust and to her otherworldly  
energies. Each becomes, in the  
influence of the other, in this how-  
and this is done, reflecting Pro-  
fessor Rohlfing's argument that  
gender is learnt, by learning the  
other gender, so far as this is pr-

sture to the auditor. Even *Aschmole* Puzzle hints (following Jung) that the hush sex and gender, the immanence in the woman, with *omnis* to woman symbolized within the man. With proper care for each other, individual qualities of "sexual" the man can follow and match a multi-organisms of the woman.

"O brave new world, 'Tint I such people in 't I" Does *Serv* then solve the Puzzle? Were I adapted to the needs of Western

little "tips" illustrating  
Britton called "modern" (i.e. post-  
Reformation); Britton said those re-  
placed "lofty" poems" (medi-  
eval) (arrangements); probably what Brit-  
ton said in mind.

... broad pattern in human societies  
... major being more dominant, con-  
... for the property and perform  
... the basic subsistence task, the  
... tent of these activities varies f

Cognitive-Developmental theory comes in for strong corrective criticism; as does Social Learning Theory to a lesser extent. Rohrbough extends her feminist

bodyguards do not put him on the surface of existence (one might retort that he is not so likely to drown there either). Could this uncertainty, with the body, a ma-

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... great churches: to Bristol, Ely,  
Peterborough, Salisbury, Winchester,  
Lichfield, and Worcester, he adds  
Bath, Beverley, and Selby, with a  
short chapter and several pages of

in this book are several of Scutti's splendid open metalwork screens (by then those regal Guiney stoves were available). And with the introduction appear two historic photo-

little "dps" limiting some  
criticism called "modern" (i.e., post-  
Reformation); Britton said those re-  
placed "lofty" apocryphal (medi-  
eval) scriptures; inevitably, what Blor-  
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human beings. Though there  
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**EXCLUSION 10**